# INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

ISSUE

The Indian Health Service (IHS) uses appropriate information technology (IT) to improve health care quality, reduce medical errors, and modernize administrative functions consistent with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) enterprise initiatives.

BACKGROUND

Information technology is essential to effective quality health care delivery and efficient resource management in the IHS. Health care is information intensive and increasingly dependent on technology to ensure that appropriate information is available whenever and wherever it is needed. The IHS IT infrastructure includes people, computers, communications, and security that support every aspect of the IHS mission. The IT infrastructure is based on an architecture that incorporates government and industry standards for the collection, processing, and transmission of information. The IHS IT program is managed as a strategic investment by senior management, fully integrated with the agency's programs, and critical to improving service delivery.
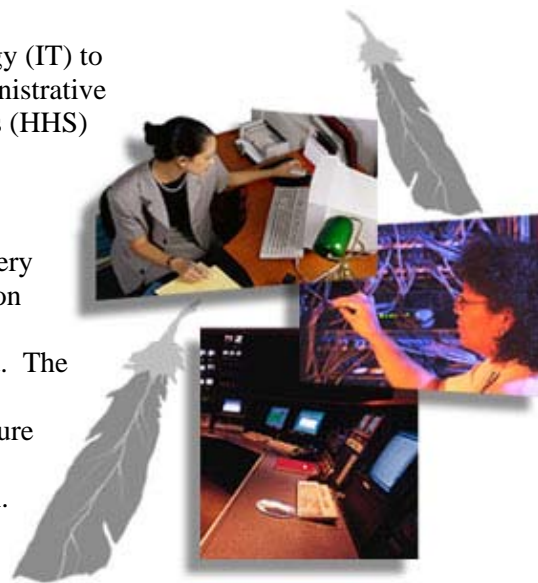
The Resource and Patient Management System (RPMS) is the IHS enterprise health information system. The RPMS consists of more than 60 software applications and is used at approximately 400 IHS, Tribal, and Urban locations. Local RPMS data are used to evaluate clinical quality as well as population and public health. Aggregate data is used to report on clinical performance measures to Congress. The IHS also maintains a centralized database of patient encounter and administrative data for statistical purposes, performance measurement for accreditation, and public health and epidemiological studies. The IHS telecommunications infrastructure connects IHS, Tribal, and Urban facilities as part of the larger HHS telecommunications network. The IHS participates in HHS enterprise-wide initiatives to improve IT infrastructure and works with the Department of Veterans Affairs and other federal partners to develop software and share technology resources. These collaborations are reflected in the IHS IT architecture and 5-year plan.

SITUATION

The IHS continues to require funding to improve its IT infrastructure to support Presidential, Secretarial and IHS goals and priorities. E-Gov initiatives, such as Consolidated Health Informatics, will dramatically improve the exchange of health care information. HHS enterprise initiatives will modernize administrative operations throughout the Department. The HHS priority to accelerate the adoption of IT in health care will reduce medical errors and improve health care quality. The IHS Electronic Health Record initiative will provide computer-based physician order entry, encounter documentation, access to medical literature, and other essential capabilities. These initiatives, as well as increasingly affordable health care technologies such as telemedicine, require continuous improvement of the IHS IT infrastructure.

OPTIONS/PLANS

The IHS program is working with Tribes and other organizations to leverage existing resources and to further enhance information systems to allow better clinical practice management and administrative reporting systems at all sites, however rural and isolated. Local, regional, and national planning can ensure appropriate and efficient application of IT throughout the system. Properly designed and implemented, future systems will provide clinicians with timely data to further improve diagnostic and treatment services and also provide local administrators with information to measure productivity and justify outlays. Additionally these systems will allow Tribal leaders, epidemiologists, senior policy staff, and others to monitor clinical quality, disease prevalence and outcomes, and health status trends as well as develop improved budget forecasts.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For referral to the appropriate spokesperson, contact the IHS Public Affairs Staff at 301-443-3593.